



Idaho National Laboratory, the Center for Advanced Energy Studies, the state of Idaho and the Idaho Rural Partnership hosted the first LinkIDAHO Broadband Summit to discuss challenges and benefits of broadband in rural and remote America.

Summit discusses broadband expansion in Idaho

By Keith Arterburn, *INL Communications & Governmental Affairs*

Broadband for rural and remote America comes with many challenges, but delivers the benefits many expect and need today.

In particular, five areas of service need broadband's high-speed Internet services in order to provide the expected communication links for public safety, education, health care, economic development and government.

Idaho National Laboratory and the Center for Advanced Energy Studies (CAES) joined with the state of Idaho and the Idaho Rural Partnership to host the first LinkIDAHO Broadband Summit on Oct. 16.

"We are excited to be working with the state and the LinkIDAHO Team in hosting the first annual Broadband Summit," said Mike Field, state broadband coordinator. "Representatives of many sectors have gathered to discuss and collaborate on ways to expand broadband connectivity and use throughout Idaho."



Michael Spead, right, senior technical specialist for ICF International, spoke to summit participants.

Using a broadband connection to a group in Idaho's northern community of Lewiston, Field gave an overview of Idaho's current broadband status and then detailed some of the completed and planned activities to accelerate broadband access across the state. He noted that mapping of existing broadband services is two-thirds complete and a series of consumer surveys has been completed. Then, he discussed investment plans, noting that five of six regions in the state have completed drafting their plans.



Learn more about broadband in Idaho at www.linkidaho.org.

Fifty representatives from the five principal interest sectors and broadband providers, plus 13 participants in Lewiston, attended the first forum, which was held in the CAES building in Idaho Falls. The group toured the LEED-certified CAES building and listened to Michael Spead, senior technical specialist for ICF International and an expert on broadband policy, regulations and the impact of changes that already are under way.

"Federal programs are changing to address the gaps that are emerging with new technologies and policies," said Spead. He noted that Idaho receives less than \$65 million of the \$8 billion spent each year to provide services for high-cost areas, low-income consumers and community anchor institutions.

Spead presented information about the impact of the new policies on state and local government, tribal regulators, consumers, emergency response, education, library services for those seeking employment, and business development.

The afternoon session was devoted to a panel that discussed the impact of having broadband for regional health care, library and education access, economic development necessities to attract and retain businesses, interoperability for emergencies and consumer expectations for living in rural areas.

"We were pleased with the excellent turnout for this first forum," said Stephanie Cook, INL's manager of Technology-Based Economic Development. "Expanding broadband in Idaho is extremely important to ensuring our good quality of life, the ability to engage in business expansion within our communities and advancing education for all citizens."

Broadband is among the fastest adopted technologies in the nation and the purpose of the Idaho Broadband Framework "is to provide context and point the way forward to expand broadband development use throughout the state of Idaho," according to an Oct. 11 executive summary for the

LinkIDAHO project. It identifies 10 detailed policy recommendations, followed by implementation suggestions for consideration by interested organizations.

Learn more about broadband in Idaho at www.linkidaho.org. For specific questions, contact Mike Field (208-332-8687, mike.field@irp.idaho.org).

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Meeting participants also learned about research at the Center for Advanced Energy Studies from spokesperson Kortny Rolston, left.